

SINGAPORE'S GREENLABEL

Introduction

The Ministry of the Environment (ENV) in Singapore launched its ecolabeling program, the “GreenLabel,” in May 1992 to “promote green consumerism” among Singapore's citizens. The GreenLabel was formed as part of Singapore’s “Green Plan,” which is the country’s overall environmental management plan. The GreenLabel is a voluntary seal-of-approval program and is open to both Singaporean and foreign companies that meet the specified product criteria. According to the Ministry of the Environment, the GreenLabel is designed to raise consumer awareness of products that exert comparatively fewer impacts on the environment, and to raise environmental awareness in general. In addition, the GreenLabel is designed to provide an incentive for “manufacturers to account for the environmental impact of their products, and to design and supply environmentally benign products” (Ong, 1997).

Singapore’s GreenLabel program cites several measures as evidence of its success in increasing environmental awareness among consumers. In a 1994 survey of 1,600 households, 50 percent of respondents said that they recognized the GreenLabel. Of these, 78 percent recognized the GreenLabel as a signature of environmentally preferable products. A significant number of those surveyed said that they would pay up to 10 percent more for environmentally preferable products. Thirty percent of those surveyed said that they consider a product’s environmental attributes as part of their purchasing decision process.

When the GreenLabel program began in 1992, award criteria were released for only five product categories. As of June 1997, the program covered 26 product categories broadly classified into ten product groups. As of March 1997, 702 products carry the GreenLabel. These products are produced by 137 different manufacturers.

Recent Developments

The GreenLabel program reports that since the program’s inception in 1992, it has adopted the methodology for determining award criteria as outlined below. The program reports that there have been no significant changes in this methodology since the program began.

Program Summary

The GreenLabel program is administered by the Environmental Health Department under the Ministry of the Environment. The ENV Secretariat receives proposals for new product categories from the public and industry. In addition, it is the Secretariat that receives and processes applications for the GreenLabel from manufacturers, collects fees, responds to inquiries about the program from the public and applicants, produces newsletters on the GreenLabel program, and provides information about the program to the media.

Draft product criteria are developed by separate Technical Workgroups (one for each product category) consisting of experts with knowledge of the manufacture, distribution, usage, and disposal of products in the category under consideration. Once draft product criteria have been developed by the Technical Workgroup, an Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives from industry, academia, statutory organizations, and environmental groups, assists the Secretariat in endorsing the most appropriate product criteria for the GreenLabel. These draft criteria are released to the public and industry for comment.

As well as being peer reviewed, the public and industry have a 30-day period in which to provide comments on the draft product criteria. The Secretariat collects these comments and forwards them to the Advisory Committee for review and consideration. The finalized criteria are forwarded to the Approving Board (consisting of senior staff members from the Ministry of the Environment) for final approval. Although the public comments and the Advisory Committee's responses are not published, once approved, the Secretariat publishes the final criteria and manufacturers are then allowed to apply for the GreenLabel.

Manufacturers with products that meet the specified product criteria are equally eligible to apply for the GreenLabel. Applicants are given application kits that lay out the terms and conditions for product approval and for the use of the GreenLabel. Compliance with the final criteria are verified through quality control and production record checks, as well as testing of sample products in accredited laboratories. An approved product is granted a license to carry the GreenLabel logo for three years. Product criteria are reviewed every three years in order to keep up with the latest technological developments associated with the product category. If major revisions to the product criteria are made at this time, manufacturers may be required to have their products re-tested to ensure that they comply with the revised criteria.

The GreenLabel is open to both domestic and foreign manufacturers wishing to become eco-certified in Singapore. This is especially important for Singapore, since the majority of products available in Singapore are manufactured overseas. As a result, it is important for ENV to encourage and convince foreign manufacturers to apply for and use the GreenLabel on their products before shipping them to Singapore. Foreign companies often employ agents or distributors in Singapore to work with them to apply for the GreenLabel. The Ministry of the Environment has made suggestions that an international and/or regional body should be set up to initiate information exchange and to promote methods of mutual recognition; however, a formal proposal of this nature has not been made.

ENV bears all the administrative costs of the program so fees are kept low in an effort to encourage as many manufacturers as possible to apply for the GreenLabel. If a company applies for certification of a product within one year of the date of release of the final criteria for that product category, it does not pay any fees for the first five years. If the application is made a year or more

after the release of the final criteria, fees are waived for a period of only three years. Other than the certification fees, most of which are waived, the manufacturer is required to pay for product testing.

Program Methodology

When the ENV Secretariat receives proposals for product categories, it determines their suitability for the GreenLabel by evaluating the environmental impacts of the categories. Once product categories are selected, award criteria are drafted. Award criteria are based on a simplified life-cycle assessment, which assesses the environmental impacts of the “few most important parameters” for each product category. Instead of examining every impact that a product exerts on the environment, from cradle-to-grave, the Singapore program isolates and studies the most important environmental concerns for the country. For example, products may be assessed on their potential impact on water and energy resources, since Singapore is not self-sufficient in either of these areas. Or the assessment may be based on solid waste disposal impacts, since Singapore has very limited solid waste disposal capacity. Award criteria may also be based on literature and environmental studies on the product categories’ impacts on the environment, other programs studies and award criteria, previous life-cycle assessments that may have been conducted by other programs, and participating producers’ input and knowledge about the product categories. Additionally, the product use, its ability to be recycled, and its ingredients are considered when developing award criteria.

Other Information

Singapore’s Ministry of the Environment intends to review the GreenLabel criteria once the International Standards Organization’s (ISO) 14020 standards for ecolabeling are finalized. However, the Ministry, does not believe that the GreenLabel scheme will undergo major restructuring based on its review of the current ISO 14020 draft documents.

The GreenLabel program is non-revenue-generating; therefore, media promotion of the program is done on a relatively limited basis. The major form of promotion for the program is actually through the manufacturers themselves. Manufacturers who apply for the ecolabel are required to use it on their certified products. Licensees’ advertisements are the main vehicle for spreading the word about the GreenLabel. Advertising promotes the manufacturer’s products as being environmentally preferable, adding value to the products, and is of benefit for the program. ENV also publishes *The Resource Conservation Bulletin*, which provides regular updates on the program. The GreenLabel is also promoted during Singapore’s annual “Clean and Green Week” held in schools and youth fairs.

References

Dr. Peck Thian Guan, Deputy Director, Environmental Technology Centre, Singapore Productivity and Standards Board. Personal communication with Abt Associates. July, 1997.

Mr. Alvin Ong, Ministry of the Environment. Personal communication with Abt Associates. August, 1997.

Ministry of the Environment, *"Make the GreenLabel Your Choice: A Guide to the Singapore Green Labelling Scheme."*

Ministry of the Environment, *Resource Conservation Bulletin*, July, 1996.

Dr. Peck Thian Guan and Mr. Tan Choon Seng, *The Singapore Eco-Labelling Scheme*, January/February, 1997

Product Categories

Final Categories

- Stationary Paper
- Hygiene Paper
- Printing Paper
- Office Automation Paper
- Carbon-zinc battery
- Alkaline battery
- Compact fluorescent lamp (integral)
- Compact fluorescent lamp (modular)
- Standard laundry powder detergent
- Concentrated laundry powder detergent
- Laundry liquid detergent
- Dishwashing detergent
- Floor cleaner
- Washing machine
- Correction fluids/tapes
- Hair-spray/gel/mousse
- Deodorant sticks/rollers/spray
- Shaving foams and creams
- Computer system unit
- Computer monitor
- Computer system with 'built-in' monitor
- Precast concrete products ()
- Bricks (made from waste or recycled materials)
- Tiles/Ceramics (made from waste or recycled materials)

Solar cell powered calculators
Solar cell powered watches

Categories Under Consideration

Air conditioners
Refrigerators
Freezers

